

A PROFILE OF LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM-BUILDING: IBERVILLE PARISH EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK

Iberville is one of seven Louisiana communities selected as a Ready Start Network in recognition of their progress towards building a high-quality early childhood education (ECE) system. This profile highlights key drivers of Iberville’s efforts to unify its ECE system since [Act 3](#), drawing from [interviews with network leaders](#), Ready Start application documents, and network performance profiles published by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE).

ECE BEFORE ACT 3

Network leaders reported that before Act 3, Iberville served a “very small number of children” in its school-based pre-k programs. Enrollment at some child care centers was also so low that they would “struggle just to stay open.” According to network leaders, centers often lacked the resources necessary to purchase materials and fund professional development. One network leader explained that while teachers

across site types “always [provided] positivity” in the classroom, they were not always well prepared to focus on children’s academic needs.

Network leaders noted that prior to Act 3, the school district, which would become the network’s lead agency as well as the network’s Head Start grantee, did not have “any type of close relationship with the child care centers” and only “somewhat of a relationship with Head Start.” Yet, Iberville was eager to tackle these challenges, and the network volunteered to participate in the pilot phase of Act 3, starting to implement quality improvement initiatives before participation became mandatory statewide.

BUILDING A COORDINATED LOCAL ECE SYSTEM

COORDINATION

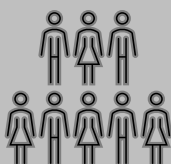
The lack of relationships and trust across site types posed a challenge for building a coordinated ECE system. One network leader explained that the attitude between site types was one of competition, with Head Start competing against child care centers and schools for children. Moreover, many child care directors did not trust the network leaders and worried they might “take over” their centers entirely. Building trust was difficult, in part, because the network struggled to

IBERVILLE AT A GLANCE

Publicly Funded ECE Sites (2018-19):
13

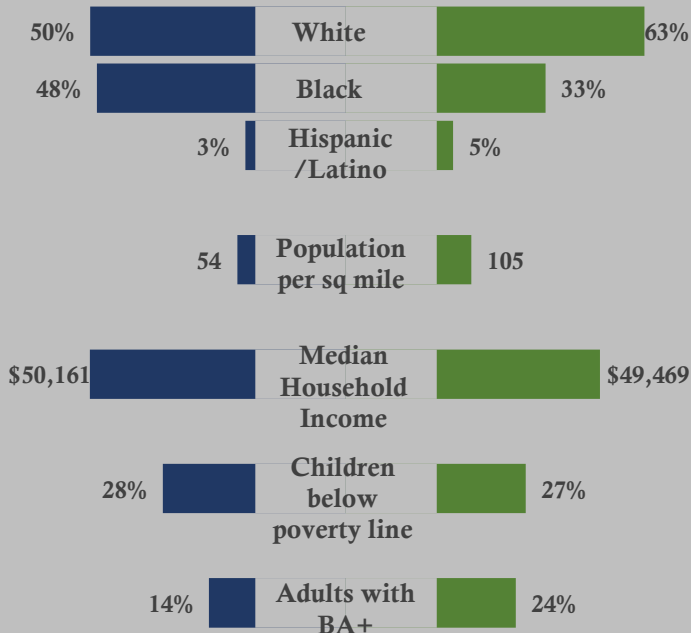


Parish Population:
32,511



Iberville

Louisiana



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convene as a group. Child care directors and teachers did not have substitutes that could cover for them while they attended a meeting. To strengthen relationships, network leaders focused on making “everyone feel comfortable coming to the table with us.”

They noted that when they were able to get all center directors to attend with school and Head Start leaders, meetings were the “perfect size” of about a dozen people. Network leaders emphasized that they treated “everyone with so much respect” and made sure that “everybody was always listened to.” They also hosted network meetings in the room where the school board convened, to signal the important role that site leaders had in network activities. They believed that all of these actions “lifted them up” as leaders and trusted partners.

QUALITY

Teachers and directors were initially wary of the new accountability measures that Act 3 mandated, such as the regular classroom observations. One network leader explained that those at child care centers, in particular, were “just afraid because they never had that type of accountability before.” Centers also faced the logistical challenge of high teacher turnover, which meant that there were constantly new teachers who needed to be trained.

Network leaders took a number of steps to address those concerns. First, they provided professional development and one-on-one coaching opportunities for all teachers to ease their discomfort and improve classroom quality. One network leader explained that they used CLASS data to identify areas of weakness and then actively worked with teachers to address those areas. The network held trainings on Saturdays and brought in trainers to instruct teachers on CLASS, teacher-child interactions, and how to implement curricula. When one child care director’s teachers particularly excelled at promoting high-quality interactions, network leaders hired her to provide additional coaching at other centers.

To account for child care centers’ insufficient access to funding and resources, the network paid stipends to child care teachers for attending these training activities. They also provided child care centers with necessary supplies, manipulatives, and technology.

Child care directors had many existing responsibilities and were daunted by meeting the demands of the new accountability system. As one network leader pointed out, a director might also “be the cook, the

APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING EXISTING CHALLENGES

- Build trust and strengthen relationships across all ECE sites by treating site leaders as respected partners
- Alleviate concerns about classroom observations and improve quality by offering professional development and one-on-one coaching
- Ease the burden of the new accountability system on child care directors by hiring an external observer
- Increase families’ awareness about ECE options with enrollment events and advertisements

janitor, and the teacher for the day,” making it difficult to find time for training or observations. To ease some of the burden, the network hired an external observer to conduct CLASS observations so that directors did not have to worry about self-monitoring the quality of interactions at their own sites. Principals, used to less time-intensive tools for K-12 classrooms, were also initially resistant to taking on such a “very lengthy observation.” However, the superintendent eventually required them to be trained, believing that it was important that they understood what high-quality interactions look like in ECE, were able to train their teachers, and could monitor and observe their own pre-k classrooms.

ACCESS

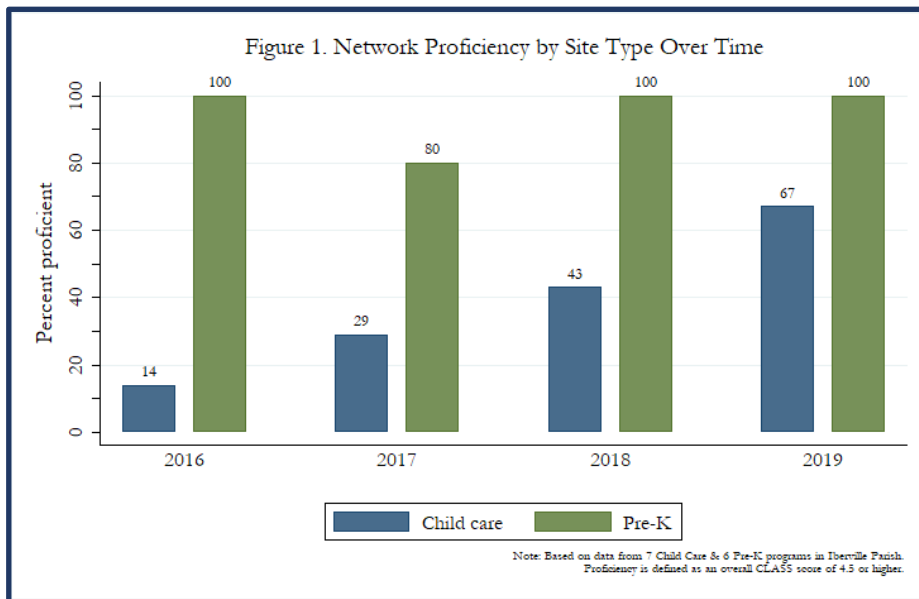
The network’s efforts to increase access focused on making families aware of how they could find ECE opportunities for their children. They held enrollment events and engaged parents who were already interacting with the school district in conversations about the care of their younger children. They also advertised their services on billboards and posted banners about various achievements physically at sites and on their website.

PROGRESS SINCE ACT 3

COORDINATION

Network leaders reported that their efforts to improve relationships across site types have been highly successful. They noted site leaders are now “very trusting” of the network leaders and view them as a supportive resource. One network leader remarked that site leaders “realized we were there to help them” and that the network was “not looking to do anything to hurt their centers or take kids from them.”

It is still a challenge for the network to schedule meetings at a time that all center directors can attend, given their hectic schedules. When site leaders have to miss a meeting, network leaders catch them up afterwards so they stay connected and informed.



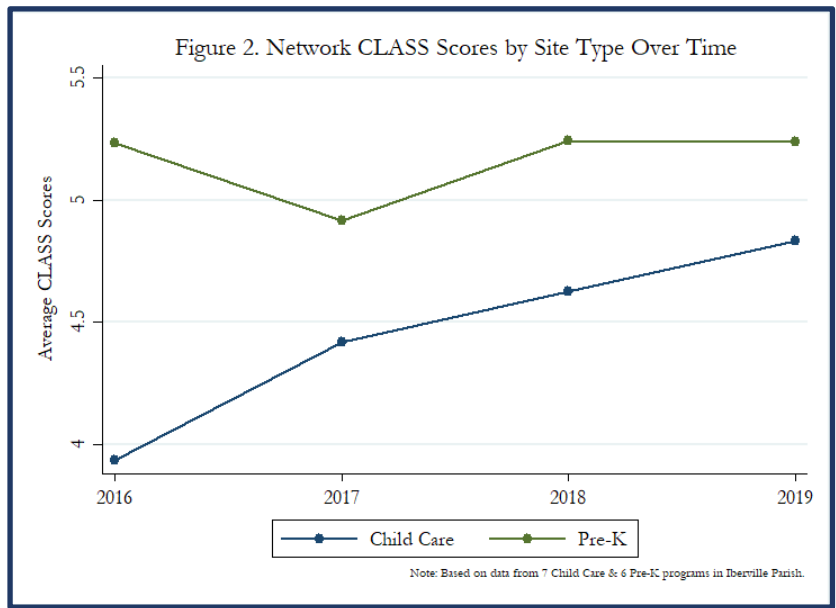
QUALITY

CLASS scores at child care centers in Iberville have consistently improved since Act 3, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. All pre-k classrooms in the network are proficient, and the child care sites have made significant progress in closing the initial gap in quality that existed. One network leader explained that due to differences in resources and training, “you may not see the progress you’re used to seeing from the effort you put in the

school system” as quickly in child care centers. While schools are at 100% proficiency, network leaders noted that child care centers are getting there – “it’s just a little bit slower.” In fact, two-thirds of child care centers were rated proficient in 2019, up from just 14 percent three years earlier.

IBERVILLE PROFILE

Network leaders highlighted the impact of CLASS’s focus on self-talk, parallel-talk, and repetition and extension on children’s oral language development, noting, “I just think that it’s taken everything to a higher level.” They also noted that the emphasis on improving and evaluating the quality of instruction has made teachers – especially those working at child care centers – feel valued. They explained that teachers are consistently held to higher standards and are no longer seen as “the babysitters.”



ACCESS

Efforts to inform families and guide them to open seats have increased enrollment, but as one network leader summarized, enrollment numbers “are higher than I think before...but they are still not nearly where they need to be.” Many families are still “not thinking of [the network] as the place to go” for help finding child care, and network leaders have found that even when they do hold enrollment events for families to explore ECE opportunities, their efforts aren’t paying off for the child care centers. A network leader explained that center directors will “come and sit at enrollment events with us all day,” but they often do not receive even one new applicant.

While 95-100% of at-risk 4-year-olds are being served in the network, largely in the fully enrolled school-based pre-k classrooms, very few 0-3 year olds (11-29%) are being served. Network leaders explained that child care centers have the “capacity to handle more kids” but struggle to attract infants and toddlers. They hypothesized that despite all of their efforts, many lower income families remain unaware of the child care subsidy program (CCAP) and therefore tend to rely on family or informal care for their younger children and “kind of give up quality because of cost.”

ADVICE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES



Build trust and seek input from ECE stakeholders: Iberville network leaders believe that building trust has been one of their greatest strengths in improving their ECE system. They explained that teachers and directors “don’t want to come and just listen to you preach to them... they want to be respected and heard and their opinions valued,” and doing so can build the trust that is essential for cooperation.



Change takes time: As other communities work to strengthen their own ECE systems, Iberville leaders also emphasized that change “doesn’t happen quickly” and is instead often made in “gradual little steps.”